Lies Concerning the History of the Soviet Union

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From Hitler to Hearst, from Conquest to Solzhenitsyn

The history of the millions of people who were allegedly incarcerated and died in the labour camps of the Soviet Union and as a result of starvation during Stalin's time.

In this world we live in, who can avoid hearing the terrible stories of suspected death and murders in the gulag labour camps of the Soviet Union? Who can avoid the stories of the millions who starved to death and the millions of oppositionists executed in the Soviet Union during Stalin's time? In the capitalist world these stories are repeated over and over again in books, newspapers, on the radio and television, and in films, and the mythical numbers of millions of victims of socialism have increased by leaps and bounds in the last 50 years.

But where in fact do these stories, and these figures, come from? Who is behind all this?

And another question: what truth is there in these stories? And what information is lying in the archives of the Soviet Union, formerly secret but opened up to historical research by Gorbachev in 1989? The authors of the myths always said that all their tales of millions having died in Stalin's Soviet Union would be confirmed the day the archives were opened up. Is that what happened? Were they confirmed in fact?

The following article shows us where these stories of millions of deaths through hunger and in labour camps in Stalin's Soviet Union originated and who is behind them.

The present author, after studying the reports of the research which has been done in the archives of the Soviet Union, is able to provide information in the form of concrete data about the real number of prisoners, the years they spent in prison and the real number of those who died and of those who were condemned to death in Stalin's Soviet Union. The truth is quite different from the myth.

There is a direct historical link running from: Hitler to Hearst, to Conquest, to Solzhenitsyn. In 1933 political change took place in Germany that were to leave their mark on world history for decades to come. On 30 January Hitler became prime minister and a new form of government, involving violence and disregard of the law, began to take shape. In order to consolidate their grip on power the Nazis called fresh elections for the 5th of March, using all propaganda means within their grasp to secure victory. A week before the elections, on 27 February, the Nazis set fire to parliament and accused the communists of being responsible. In the elections that followed, the Nazis secured 17.3 million votes and 288 deputies, about 48% of the electorate (in November they had secured 11.7 million votes and 196 deputies). Once the Communist Party was banned, the Nazis began to persecute the Social Democrats and the trade union movement, and the first concentration camps began to fill up with all those left-wing men and women. In the meantime, Hitler's power in parliament continued to grow, with the help of the right wing. On 24 March, Hitler caused a law to be passed by parliament which conferred on him absolute power to rule the country for 4 years without consulting parliament. From then on began the open persecution of the Jews, the first of whom began to enter the concentration camps where communists and left social-democrats were already being held. Hitler pressed ahead with his bid for absolute power, renouncing the 1918 international accords that had imposed restrictions on the arming and militarisation of Germany. Germany's re-armament took place at great speed. This was the situation in the international political arena when the myths concerning those dying in the Soviet Union began to be put together.

The Ukraine as a German Territory

At Hitler's side in the German leadership was Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, the man in charge of inculcating the Nazi dream into the German people. This was a dream of a racially pure people living in a Greater Germany, a country with broad lebensraum, a wide space in which to live. One part of this lebensraum, an area to the east of Germany which was, indeed, far larger than Germany itself, had yet to be conquered and incorporated into the German nation. In 1925, in Mein Kampf

Hitler had already pointed to the Ukraine as an essential part of this German living space. The Ukraine and other regions of Eastern Europe needed to belong to the German nation so that they could be utilised in a 'proper' manner. According to Nazi propaganda, the Nazi sword would liberate this territory in order to make space for the German race. With German technology and German enterprise, the Ukraine would be transformed into an area producing cereals for Germany. But first the Germans had to liberate the Ukraine of its population of 'inferior beings' who, according to Nazi propaganda, would be put to work as a slave labour force in German homes, factories and fields - anywhere they were needed by the German economy.

The conquest of the Ukraine and other areas of the Soviet Union would necessitate war against the Soviet Union, and this war had to be prepared well in advance. To this end the Nazi propaganda ministry, headed by Goebbels, began a campaign around a supposed genocide committed by the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, a dreadful period of catastrophic famine deliberately provoked by Stalin in order to force the peasantry to accept socialist policy. The purpose of the Nazi campaign was to prepare world public opinion for the 'liberation' of the Ukraine by German troops. Despite huge efforts and in spite of the fact that some of the German propaganda texts were published in the English press, the Nazi campaign around the supposed 'genocide' in the Ukraine was not very successful at the world level. It was clear that Hitler and Goebbels needed help in spreading their libellous rumours about the Soviet Union. That help they found in the USA.

William Hearst - Friend of Hitler

William Randolph Hearst is the name of a multi-millionaire who sought to help the Nazis in their psychological warfare against the Soviet Union. Hearst was a well-known US newspaper proprietor known as the 'father' of the so-called 'yellow press', i.e., the sensationalist press. William Hearst began his career as a newspaper editor in 1885 when his father, George Hearst, a millionaire mining industrialist, Senator and newspaper proprietor himself, put him in charge of the San Francisco Daily Examiner.

This was also the start of the Hearst newspaper empire, an empire which strongly influenced the lives and thinking of North Americans. After his father died, William Hearst sold all the mining industry shares he inherited and began to invest capital in the world of journalism. His first purchase was the New York Morning Journal, a

traditional newspaper which Hearst completely transformed into a sensationalist rag. He bought his stories at any price, and when there were no atrocities or crimes to report, it behoved his journalists and photographers to 'arrange' matters. It is this which in fact characterises the 'yellow press': lies and 'arranged' atrocities served up as truth.

These lies of Hearst's made him a millionaire and a very important personage in the newspaper world. In 1935 he was one of the richest men in the world, with a fortune estimated at $200 million. After his purchase of the Morning Journal, Hearst went on to buy and establish daily and weekly newspapers throughout the US. In the 1940s, William Hearst owned 25 daily newspapers, 24 weekly newspapers, 12 radio stations, 2 world news services, one business providing news items for films, the Cosmopolitan film company, and a lot of others. In 1948 he bought one of the US's first TV stations, BWAL-TV in Baltimore. Hearst's newspapers sold 13 million copies a day and had close to 40 million readers. Almost a third of the adult population of the US were reading Hearst newspapers every day. Furthermore, many millions of people throughout the world received information from the Hearst press via his news services, films and a series of newspapers that were translated and published in large quantities all over the world. The figures quoted above demonstrate how the Hearst empire was able to influence American politics, and indeed world politics, over very many years - on issues which included opposition to the US entering the Second World War on the side of the Soviet Union and support for the McCarthyite anti-communist witch-hunts of the 1950s.

William Hearst's outlook was ultra-conservative, nationalist and anti-communist. His politics were the politics of the extreme right. In 1934 he travelled to Germany, where he was received by Hitler as a guest and friend. After this trip, Hearst's newspapers became even more reactionary, always carrying articles against socialism, against the Soviet Union and especially against Stalin. Hearst also tried to use his newspapers for overt Nazi propaganda purposes, publishing a series of articles by Goering, Hitler's right-hand man. The protests of many readers, however, forced him to stop publishing such items and to withdraw them from circulation.

After his visit to Hitler, Hearst's sensationalist newspapers were filled with 'revelations' about the terrible happenings in the Soviet Union - murders, genocide, slavery, luxury for the rulers and starvation for the people, all these were the big news items almost every day. The material was provided to Hearst by the Gestapo, Nazi Germany's political police. On the front pages of the newspapers there often appeared caricatures and falsified pictures of the Soviet Union, with Stalin portrayed as a murderer holding a dagger in his hand. We should not forget that these articles

were read each day by 40 million people in the US and millions of others worldwide!

The myth concerning the famine in the Ukraine

One of the first campaigns of the Hearst press against the Soviet Union revolved round the question of the millions alleged to have died as a result of the Ukraine famine. This campaign began on 8 February 1935 with a front-page headline in the Chicago American '6 million people die of hunger in the Soviet Union'. Using material supplied by Nazi Germany, William Hearst, the press baron and Nazi sympathiser, began to publish fabricated stories about a genocide which was supposed to have been deliberately perpetrated by the Bolsheviks and had caused several million to die of starvation in the Ukraine. The truth of the matter was altogether different. In fact what took place in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1930s was a major class struggle in which poor landless peasants had risen up against the rich landowners, the kulaks, and had begun a struggle for collectivisation, a struggle to form kolkhozes.

This great class struggle, involving directly or indirectly some 120 million peasants, certainly gave rise to instability in agricultural production and food shortages in some regions. Lack of food did weaken people, which in turn led to an increase in the number falling victim to epidemic diseases. These diseases were at that time regrettably common throughout the world. Between 1918 and 1920 an epidemic of Spanish flu caused the death of 20 million people in the US and Europe, but nobody accused the governments of these countries of killing their own citizens. The fact is that there was nothing these government could do in the face of epidemics of this kind. It was only with the development of penicillin during the second world war, that it became possible for such epidemics to be effectively contained. This did not become generally available until towards the end of the 1940s.

The Hearst press articles asserting that millions were dying of famine in the Ukraine - a famine supposedly deliberately provoked by the communists - went into graphic and lurid detail. The Hearst press used every means possible to make their lies seem like the truth, and succeeded in causing public opinion in the capitalist countries to turn sharply against the Soviet Union. This was the origin of the first giant myth manufactured alleging millions were dying in the Soviet Union. In the wave of protests against the supposedly communist-provoked famine which the Western press unleashed, nobody was interested in listening to the Soviet Union's denials and complete exposure of the Hearst press lies, a situation which prevailed

from 1934 until 1987! For more than 50 years several generations of people the world over were brought up on a diet of these slanders to harbour a negative view of socialism in the Soviet Union.

The Hearst mass media empire in 1998

William Hearst died in 1951 at his house in Beverly Hills, California. Hearst left behind him a mass-media empire which to this day continues to spread his reactionary message throughout the world. The Hearst Corporation is one of the largest enterprises in the world, incorporating more that 100 companies and employing 15,000 people. The Hearst empire today comprises magazines, books, radio, TV, cable TV, news agencies and multimedia.

52 years before the truth emerges

The Nazi disinformation campaign about the Ukraine did not die with the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War. The Nazi lies were taken over by the CIA and MI5, and were always guaranteed a prominent place in the propaganda war against the Soviet Union. The McCarthyite anti-communist witch hunts after the Second World War also thrived on the tales of the millions who died of starvation in the Ukraine. In 1953 a book on this subject was published in the US. This book was entitled 'Black Deeds of the Kremlin'. Its publication was financed by Ukrainian refugees in the US, people who had collaborated with the Nazis in the Second World War and to whom the American government gave political asylum, presenting them to the world as 'democrats'.

When Reagan was elected to the US Presidency and began his 1980s anti-communist crusade, propaganda about the millions who died in the Ukraine was again revived. In 1984 a Harvard professor published a book called 'Human Life in Russia' which repeated all the false information produced by the Hearst press in 1934. In 1984, then, we were finding Nazi lies and falsifications dating from the 1930s being revived, but this time under the respectable cloak of an American university. But this was not the end of it. In 1986 yet another book appeared on the subject, entitled 'Harvest of Sorrow', written by a former member of the British secret service, Robert Conquest, now a professor at Stamford University in California. For his 'work' on the book, Conquest received $80,000 from the Ukraine National Organization. This same organisation also paid for a film made in 1986

called 'Harvest of Despair', in which, inter alia, material from Conquest's book was used. By this time the number of people it was alleged in the US had lost their lives in the Ukraine through starvation had been upped to 15 million!

Nevertheless the millions said to have died of starvation according to the Hearst press in America, parroted in books and films, was completely false information. The Canadian journalist, Douglas Tottle, meticulously exposed the falsifications in his book 'Fraud, famine and fascism - the Ukrainian genocide myth from Hitler to Harvard', published in Toronto in 1987. Among other things, Tottle proved that the photographic material used, horrifying photographs of starving children, had been taken from 1922 publications at a time when millions of people did die from hunger and war conditions because eight foreign armies had invaded the Soviet Union during the Civil War of 1918-1921. Douglas Tottle gives the facts surrounding the reporting of the famine of 1934 and exposes the assorted lies published in the Hearst press. One journalist who had over a long period of time sent reports and photographs from supposed famine areas was Thomas Walter, a man who never set foot in the Ukraine and even in Moscow had spent but a bare five days. This fact was revealed by the journalist Louis Fisher, Moscow Correspondent of The Nation, an American newspaper. Fisher also revealed that the journalist M. Parrott, the real Hearst press correspondent in Moscow, had sent Hearst reports that were never published concerning the excellent harvest achieved by the Soviet Union in 1933 and on the Ukraine's advancement. Tottle proves as well that the journalist who wrote the reports on the alleged Ukrainian famine, 'Thomas Walker', was really called Robert Green and was a convict who had escaped from a state prison in Colorado! This Walker, or Green, was arrested when he returned to the US and when he appeared in court, he admitted that he had never been to the Ukraine. All the lies concerning millions dead of starvation in the Ukraine in the 1930s, in a famine supposedly engineered by Stalin only came to be unmasked in 1987! Hearst, the Nazi, the police agent Conquest and others had conned millions of people with their lies and fake reports. Even today the Nazi Hearst's stories are still being repeated in newly-published books written by authors in the pay of right-wing interests.

The Hearst press, having a monopolist position in many States of the US, and having news agencies all over the world, was the great megaphone of the Gestapo. In a world dominated by monopoly capital, it was possible for the Hearst press to transform Gestapo lies into 'truths' emitted from dozens of newspapers, radio stations and, later on, TV channels, the world over. When the Gestapo disappeared, this dirty propaganda war against socialism in the Soviet Union carried on regardless, albeit with the CIA as its new patron. The anti-communist campaigns of the American press were not scaled down in the slightest. Business continued as usual, first at the bidding of the Gestapo and then at the bidding of the CIA.

Robert Conquest at the heart of the myths

This man, who is so widely quoted in the bourgeois press, this veritable oracle of the bourgeoisie, deserves some specific attention at this point. Robert Conquest is one of the two authors who has most written on the millions dying in the Soviet Union. He is in truth the creator of all the myths and lies concerning the Soviet Union that have been spread since the Second World War. Conquest is primarily known for his books The Great Terror (1969) and Harvest of Sorrow (1986). Conquest writes of millions dying of starvation in the Ukraine, in the gulag labour camps and during the Trials of 1936-38, using as his sources of information exiled Ukrainians living in the US and belonging to rightist parties, people who had collaborated with the Nazis in the Second World War. Many of Conquest's heroes were known to have been war criminals who led and participated in the genocide of the Ukraine's Jewish population in 1942. One of these people was Mykola Lebed, convicted as a war criminal after the Second World War. Lebed had been security chief in Lvov during the Nazi occupation and presided over the terrible persecutions of the Jews which took place in 1942. In 1949 the CIA took Lebed off to the United States where he worked as a source of disinformation.

The style of Conquest's books is one of violent and fanatical anti-communism. In his 1969 book, Conquest tells us that those who died of starvation in the Soviet Union between 1932-1933 amounted to between 5 million and 6 million people, half of them in the Ukraine. But in 1983, during Reagan's anti-communist crusade, Conquest had extended the famine into 1937 and increased the number of victims to 14 million! Such assertions turned out to be well rewarded: in 1986 he was signed up by Reagan to write material for his presidential campaign aimed at preparing the American people for a Soviet invasion. The text in question was called 'What to do when the Russians come - a survivalists' handbook'! Strange words coming from a Professor of History!

The fact is that there is nothing strange in it at all, coming as it does from a man who has spent his entire life living off lies and fabrications about the Soviet Union and Stalin - first as a secret service agent and then as a writer and professor at Stamford University in California. Conquest's past was exposed by the Guardian of 27 January 1978 in an article which identified him as a former agent in the disinformation department of the British Secret Service, i.e., the Information Research Department (IRD). The IRD was a section set up in 1947 (originally called the Communist Information Bureau) whose main task it was to combat communist

influence throughout the world by planting stories among politicians, journalists and others in a position to influence public opinion. The activities of the IRD were very wide-ranging, as much in Britain as abroad. When the IRD had to be formally disbanded in 1977, as a result of the exposure of its involvement with the far right, it was discovered that in Britain alone more than 100 of the best-known journalists had an IRD contact who regularly supplied them with material for articles. This was routine in several major British newspapers, such as the Financial Times, The Times, Economist, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Express, The Guardian and others. The facts exposed by the Guardian therefore give us an indication as to how the secret services were able to manipulate the news reaching the public at large.

Robert Conquest worked for the IRD from when it was set up until 1956. Conquest's 'work' there was to contribute to the so-called 'black history' of the Soviet Union fake stories put out as fact and distributed among journalists and others able to influence public opinion. After he had formally left the IRD, Conquest continued to write books suggested by the IRD, with secret service support. His book 'The Great Terror', a basic right-wing text on the subject of the power struggle that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937, was in fact a recompilation of text he had written when working for the secret services. The book was finished and published with the help of the IRD. A third of the publication run was bought by the Praeger press, normally associated with the publication of literature originating from CIA sources. Conquest's book was intended for presentation to 'useful fools', such as university professors and people working in the press, radio and TV, to ensure that the lies of Conquest and the extreme right continued to be spread throughout large swathes of the population. Conquest to this day remains for right-wing historians one of the most important sources of material on the Soviet Union.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Another person who is always associated with books and articles on the supposed millions who lost their lives or liberty in the Soviet Union is the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn became famous throughout the capitalist world towards the end of 1960 with his book, The Gulag Archipelago. He himself had been sentenced in 1946 to 8 years in a labour camp for counter-revolutionary activity in the form of distribution of anti-Soviet propaganda. According to Solzhenitsyn, the fight against Nazi Germany in the Second World War could have been avoided if the Soviet government had reached a compromise with Hitler. Solzhenitsyn also accused the Soviet government and Stalin of being even worse than Hitler from the point of view, according to him, of the dreadful effects of the war on the people of the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn did not hide his Nazi

sympathies. He was condemned as a traitor.

Solzhenitsyn began in 1962 to publish books in the Soviet Union with the consent and help of Nikita Khrushchev. The first book he published was A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, concerning the life of a prisoner. Khrushchev used Solzhenitsyn's texts to combat Stalin's socialist heritage. In 1970 Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for literature with his book The Gulag Archipelago. His books then began to be published in large quantities in capitalist countries, their author having become one of the most valuable instruments of imperialism in combating the socialism of the Soviet Union. His texts on the labour camps were added to the propaganda on the millions who were supposed to have died in the Soviet Union and were presented by the capitalist mass media as though they were true. In 1974, Solzhenitsyn renounced his Soviet citizenship and emigrated to Switzerland and then the US. At that time he was considered by the capitalist press to be the greatest fighter for freedom and democracy. His Nazi sympathies were buried so as not to interfere with the propaganda war against socialism.

In the US, Solzhenitsyn was frequently invited to speak at important meetings. He was, for example, the main speaker at the AFL-CIO union congress in 1975, and on 15 July 1975 he was invited to give a lecture on the world situation to the US Senate! His lectures amount to violent and provocative agitation, arguing and propagandising for the most reactionary positions. Among other things he agitated for Vietnam to be attacked again after its victory over the US. And more: after 40 years of fascism in Portugal, when left-wing army officers took power in the people's revolution of 1974, Solzhenitsyn began to propagandise in favour of US military intervention in Portugal which, according to him, would join the Warsaw Pact if the US did not intervene! In his lectures, Solzhenitsyn always bemoaned the liberation of Portugal's African colonies.

But it is clear that the main thrust of Solzhenitsyn's speeches was always the dirty war against socialism - from the alleged execution of several million people in the Soviet Union to the tens of thousands of Americans supposedly imprisoned and enslaved, according to Solzhenitsyn, in North Vietnam! This idea of Solzhenitsyn's of Americans being used as slave labour in North Vietnam gave rise to the Rambo films on the Vietnam war. American journalists who dared write in favour of peace between the US and the Soviet Union were accused by Solzhenitsyn in his speeches of being potential traitors. Solzhenitsyn also propagandised in favour of increasing US military capacity against the Soviet Union, which he claimed was more powerful in 'tanks and aeroplanes, by five to seven times, than the US' as well as in atomic weapons which 'in short' he alleged were 'two, three or even five times' more

powerful in the Soviet Union than those held by the US. Solzhenitsyn's lectures on the Soviet Union represented the voice of the extreme right. But he himself went even further to the right in his public support of fascism.

Support for Franco's fascism

After Franco died in 1975, the Spanish fascist regime began to lose control of the political situation and at the beginning of 1976, events in Spain captured world public opinion. There were strikes and demonstrations to demand democracy and freedom, and Franco's heir, King Juan Carlos, was obliged very cautiously to introduce some liberalisation in order to calm down the social agitation.

At this most important moment in Spanish political history, Alexander Solzhenitsyn appears in Madrid and gives an interview to the programme Directisimo one Saturday night, the 20th of March, at peak viewing time (see the Spanish newspapers, ABC and Ya of 21 March 1976). Solzhenitsyn, who had been provided with the questions in advance, used the occasion to make all kinds of reactionary statements. His intention was not to support the King's so-called liberalisation measures. On the contrary, Solzhenitsyn warned against democratic reform. In his television interview he declared that 110 million Russians had died the victims of socialism, and he compared 'the slavery to which Soviet people were subjected to the freedom enjoyed in Spain'. Solzhenitsyn also accused 'progressive circles' of 'Utopians' of considering Spain to be a dictatorship. By 'progressive', he meant anyone in the democratic opposition - were they liberals, social-democrats or communists. 'Last autumn,' said Solzhenitsyn, 'world public opinion was worried about the fate of Spanish terrorists [i.e., Spanish anti-fascists sentenced to death by the Franco regime]. All the time progressive public opinion demands democratic political reform while supporting acts of terrorism'. 'Those who seek rapid democratic reform, do they realise what will happen tomorrow or the day after? In Spain there may be democracy tomorrow, but after tomorrow will it be able to avoid falling from democracy into totalitarianism?' To cautious inquiries by the journalists as to whether such statements could not be seen as support for regimes in countries where there was no liberty, Solzhenitsyn replied: 'I only know one place where there is no liberty and that is Russia.' Solzhenitsyn's statements on Spanish television were a direct support to Spanish fascism, an ideology he supports to this day. This is one of the reasons why Solzhenitsyn began to disappear from public view in his 18 years of exile in the US, and one of the reasons he began to get less than total support from capitalist governments. For the capitalists it was a gift from heaven to be able to use a man like Solzhenitsyn in their dirty war against socialism, but everything has its limits. In the new capitalist Russia, what

determines the support of the west for political groups is purely and simply the ability of doing good business with high profits under the wing of such groups. Fascism as an alternative political regime for Russia is not considered to be good for business. For this reason Solzhenitsyn's political plans for Russia are a dead letter as far as Western support is concerned. What Solzhenitsyn wants for Russia's political future is a return to the authoritarian regime of the Tsars, hand-in-hand with the traditional Russian Orthodox Church! Even the most arrogant imperialists are not interested in supporting political stupidity of this magnitude. To find anyone who supports Solzhenitsyn in the West one has to search among the dumbheads of the extreme right.

Nazis, the police and the fascists

So these are the most worthy purveyors of the bourgeois myths concerning the millions who are supposed to have died and been imprisoned in the Soviet Union: the Nazi William Hearst, the secret agent Robert Conquest and the fascist Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Conquest played the leading role, since it was his information that was used by the capitalist mass media the world over, and was even the basis for setting up whole schools in certain universities. Conquest's work is without a doubt a first-class piece of police disinformation. In the 1970s, Conquest received a great deal of help from Solzhenitsyn and a series of secondary characters like Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev. In addition there appeared here and there all over the world a number of people who dedicated themselves to speculating about the number of dead and incarcerated and were always paid in gold by the bourgeois press. But the truth of the matter was finally exposed and has revealed the true face of these falsifiers of history. Gorbachev's orders to open the party's secret archives to historical investigation had consequences nobody could have foreseen.

The archives demonstrate the propaganda lies

The speculation about the millions who died in the Soviet Union is part of the dirty propaganda war against the Soviet Union and for this very reason the denials and explanations given by the Soviet Union were never taken seriously and never found any space in the capitalist press. They were, on the contrary, ignored, while the 'specialists' bought by capital were given as much space as they wanted in order to spread their fictions. And what fictions they were! What the millions of dead and imprisoned claimed by Conquest and other 'critics' had in common was that they were the result of false statistical approximations and evaluation methods lacking

any scientific basis.

Fraudulent methods give rise to millions of dead

Conquest, Solzhenitsyn, Medvedev and others used statistics published by the Soviet Union, for instance, national population censuses, to which they added a supposed population increase without taking account of the situation in the country. In this way they reached their conclusions as to how many people there ought to have been in the country at the end of given years. The people who were missing were claimed to have died or been incarcerated because of socialism. The method is simple but also completely fraudulent. This type of 'revelation' of such important political events would never have been accepted if the 'revelation' in question concerned the western world. In such a case it is certain that professors and historians would have protested against such fabrications. But since it was the Soviet Union that was the object of the fabrications, they were acceptable. One of the reasons is certainly that professors and historians place their professional advancement well ahead of their professional integrity.

In numbers, what were the final conclusions of the 'critics'? According to Robert Conquest (in an estimate he made in 1961) 6 million people died of starvation in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. This number Conquest increased to 14 million in 1986. As regards what he says about the gulag labour camps, there were detained there, according to Conquest, 5 million prisoners in 1937 before the purges of the party, the army and the state apparatus began. After the start of the purges then, according to Conquest, during 1937-38, there would have been an additional 7 million prisoners, making the total 12 million prisoners in the labour camps in 1939! And these 12 million of Conquest's would only have been the political prisoners! In the labour camps there were also common criminals, who, according to Conquest, would have far outnumbered the political prisoners. This means, according to Conquest, that there would have been 25-30 million prisoners in the labour camps of the Soviet Union.

Again according to Conquest, a million political prisoners were executed between 1937 and 1939, and another 2 million died of hunger. The final tally resulting from the purges of 1937-39, then, according to Conquest, was 9 million, of whom 3 million would have died in prison. These figures were immediately subjected to 'statistical adjustment' by Conquest to enable him to reach the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had killed no fewer than 12 million political prisoners between 1930 and

1953. Adding these figures to the numbers said to have died in the famine of the 1930s, Conquest arrived at the conclusion that the Bolsheviks killed 26 million people. In one of his last statistical manipulations, Conquest claimed that in 1950 there had been 12 million political prisoners in the Soviet Union.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn used more or less the same statistical methods as Conquest. But by using these pseudo-scientific methods on the basis of different premises, he arrived at even more extreme conclusions. Solzhenitsyn accepted Conquest's estimate of 6 million deaths arising from the famine of 1932-33. Nevertheless, as far as the purges of 1936-39 were concerned, he believed that at least 1 million people died each year. Solzhenitsyn sums up by telling us that from the collectivisation of agriculture to the death of Stalin in 1953, the communists killed 66 million people in the Soviet Union. On top of that he holds the Soviet government responsible for the death of the 44 million Russians he claims were killed in the Second World War. Solzhenitsyn's conclusion is that '110 million Russians fell, victims of socialism'. As far as prisoners were concerned, Solzhenitsyn tells us that the number of people in labour camps in 1953 was 25 million.

Gorbachev opens the archives

The collection of fantasy figures set out above, the product of extremely well paid fabrication, appeared in the bourgeois press in the 1960s, always presented as true facts ascertained through the application of scientific method.

Behind these fabrications lurked the western secret services, mainly the CIA and MI5. The impact of the mass media on public opinion is so great that the figures are even today believed to be true by large sections of the population of Western countries.

This shameful situation has worsened. In the Soviet Union itself, where Solzhenitsyn and other well-known 'critics' such as Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev could find nobody to support their many fantasies, a significant change took place in 1990. In the new 'free press' opened up under Gorbachev, everything opposed to socialism was hailed as positive, with disastrous results. Unprecedented speculative inflation began to take place in the numbers of those who were alleged to have died or been imprisoned under socialism, now all mixed up into a single group of tens of millions of 'victims' of the communists.

The hysteria of Gorbachev's new free press brought to the fore the lies of Conquest and Solzhenitsyn. At the same time Gorbachev opened up the archives of the Central Committee to historical research, a demand of the free press. The opening up of the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party is really the central issue in this tangled tale, this for two reasons: partly because in the archives can be found the facts that can shed light on the truth. But even more important is the fact that those speculating wildly on the number of people killed and imprisoned in the Soviet Union had all been claiming for years that the day the archives were opened up the figures they were citing would be confirmed. Every one of these speculators in the dead and incarcerated claimed that this would be the case: Conquest, Sakharov, Medvedev, and all the rest. But when the archives were opened up and research reports based on the actual documents began to be published a very strange thing happened. Suddenly both Gorbachev's free press and the speculators in dead and incarcerated completely lost interest in the archives.

The results of the research carried out on the archives of the Central Committee by Russian historians Zemskov, Dougin and Xlevnjuk, which began to appear in scientific journals as from 1990, went entirely unremarked. The reports containing the results of this historical research went completely against the inflationary current as regards the numbers who were being claimed by the 'free press' to have died or been incarcerated. Therefore their contents remained unpublicised. The reports were published in low-circulation scientific journals practically unknown to the public at large. Reports of the results of scientific research could hardly compete with the press hysteria, so the lies of Conquest and Solzhenitsyn continued to gain the support of many sectors of the former Soviet Union's population. In the West also, the reports of the Russian researchers on the penal system under Stalin were totally ignored on the front pages of newspapers, and by TV news broadcasts. Why?

What the Russian research shows

The research on the Soviet penal system is set out in a report nearly 9,000 pages long. The authors of this report are many, but the best-known of them are the Russian historians V.N. Zemskov, A.N. Dougin and O.V. Xlevnjuk. Their work began to be published in 1990 and by 1993 had nearly been finished and published almost in its entirety. The reports came to the knowledge of the West as a result of collaboration between researchers of different Western countries. The two works with which the present author is familiar are: the one which appeared in the French

journal l'Histoire in September 1993, written by Nicholas Werth, the chief researcher of the French scientific research centre, CNRS (Centre National de Ia Recherche Scientifique), and the work published in the US journal American Historical Review by J. Arch Getty, a professor of history at the University of California, Riverside, in collaboration with G.T. Rettersporn, a CNRS researcher, and the Russian researcher, V.A.N. Zemskov, from the Institute of Russian History (part of the Russian Academy of Science). Today books have appeared on the matter written by the above-named researchers or by others from the same research team. Before going any further, I want to make clear, so that no confusion arises in the future, that none of the scientists involved in this research has a socialist world outlook. On the contrary their outlook is bourgeois and anti-socialist. Indeed many of them are quite reactionary. This is said so that the reader should not imagine that what is to be set out below is the product of some 'communist conspiracy'. What has happened is that the above-named researchers have thoroughly exposed the lies of Conquest, Solzhenitsyn, Medvedev and others, which they have done purely by reason of the fact that they place their professional integrity in first place and will not allow themselves to be bought for propaganda purposes.

The results of the Russian research answer a very large number of questions about the Soviet penal system. For us it is the Stalin era that is of greatest interest, and it is there we find cause for debate. We will pose a number of very specific questions and we will seek out our replies in the journals l'Histoire and the American Historical Review. This will be the best way of bringing into the debate some of the most important aspects of the Soviet penal system. The questions are the following:

What did the Soviet penal system consist of?

How many prisoners were there - both political and non-political?

How many people died in the labour camps?

How many people were condemned to death in the years before 1953, especially in the purges of 1937-38?

How long, on average, were the prison sentences?

After answering these five questions, we will discuss the punishments imposed on the two groups which are most frequently mentioned in connection with prisoners and deaths in the Soviet Union, namely the kulaks convicted in 1930 and the counter-revolutionaries convicted in 1936-38.

Labour camps in the penal system

Let us start with the question of the nature of the Soviet penal system. After 1930 the Soviet penal system included prisons, labour camps, the labour colonies of the gulag, special open zones and obligation to pay fines. Whoever was remanded into custody was generally sent to a normal prison while investigations took place to establish whether he might be innocent, and could thus be set free, or whether he should go on trial. An accused person on trial could either be found innocent (and set free) or guilty. If found guilty he could be sentenced to pay a fine, to a term of imprisonment or, more unusually, to face execution. A fine could be a given percentage of his wages for a given period of time. Those sentenced to prison terms could be put in different kinds of prison depending on the type of offence involved.

To the gulag labour camps were sent those who had committed serious offences (homicide, robbery, rape, economic crimes, etc.) as well as a large proportion of those convicted of counter-revolutionary activities. Other criminals sentenced to terms longer than 3 years could also be sent to labour camps. After spending some time in a labour camp, a prisoner might be moved to a labour colony or to a special open zone.

The labour camps were very large areas where the prisoners lived and worked under close supervision. For them to work and not to be a burden on society was obviously necessary. No healthy person got by without working. It is possible that these days people may think this was a terrible thing, but this is the way it was. The number of labour camps in existence in 1940 was 53.

There were 425 gulag labour colonies. These were much smaller units than the labour camps, with a freer regime and less supervision. To these were sent prisoners with shorter prison terms - people who had committed less serious criminal or political offences. They worked in freedom in factories or on the land and formed part of civil society. In most cases the whole of the wages he earned from his labour belonged to the prisoner, who in this respect was treated the same as any other worker.

The special open zones were generally agricultural areas for those who had been

exiled, such as the kulaks who had been expropriated during collectivisation. Other people found guilty of minor criminal or political offences might also serve their terms in these areas.

454,000 is not 9 million

The second question concerned how many political prisoners there were, and how many common criminals. This question includes those imprisoned in labour camps, gulag colonies and the prisons (though it should be remembered that in the labour colonies there was, in the majority of cases, only partial loss of liberty). The Table below shows the data which appeared in the American Historical Review, data which encompass a period of 20 years beginning in 1934, when the penal system was unified under a central administration, until 1953, the year Stalin died.

Table - The American Historical Review

USSR Custodial Population 1934-1953

Custodial

Population

January 1 Gulag

Working

Camps Counter-

revolution-

aries %

counter-

revs. Died %

Died Freed Escaped Gulag

Labor

Colonies Prisons Total

1934	510,307	135,190	26.5	26,295	5.2	147,272	83,490	
		510,307						

1935	725,438	118,256	16.3	28,328	3.9	211,035	67,493	240,259	965,697
1936	839,406	105,849	12.6	20,595	2.5	369,544	58,313	457,088	1,296,494
1937	820,881	104,826	12.8	25,376	3.1	364,437	58,264	375,488	1,196,369
1938	996,367	185,324	18.6	90,546	9.1	279,966	32,033	885,203	1,881,570
1939	1,317,195	454,432	34.5	50,502	3.8	223,622	12,333	355,243	350,538	2,022,976
1940	1,344,408	444,999	33.1	46,665	3.5	316,825	11,813	315,584	190,266	1,850,258
1941	1,500,524	420,293	28.7	100,997	6.7	624,276	10,592	429,205	487,739	2,417,468
1942	1,415,596	407,988	29.6	248,877	18.0	509,538	11,822	360,447	277,992	2,054,035
1943	983,974	345,397	35.6	166,967	17.0	336,135	6,242	500,208	235,313	1,719,495
1944	663,594	268,861	40.7	60,948	9.2	152,113	3,586	516,225	155,213	1,335,032
1945	715,506	283,351	41.2	43,848	6.1	336,750	2,196	745,171	279,969	1,740,646
1946	600,897	333,833	59.2	18,154	3.0	115,700	2,642	956,224	261,500	1,818,621
1947	808,839	427,653	54.3	35,668	4.4	194,886	3,779	912,794	306,163	2,027,796
1948	1,108,057	416,156	38.0	27,605	2.5	261,148	4,261	1,091,478	275,850	2,475,385
1949	1,216,361	420,696	34.9	15,739	1.3	178,449	2,583	1,140,324	2,356,685
1950	1,416,300	578,912	22.7	14,703	1.0	216,210	2,577	1,145,051	2,561,351
1951	1,533,767	475,976	31.0	15,587	1.0	254,269	2,318		

	994,379		2,528,146					
1952	1,711,202	480,766	28.1	10,604	0.6	329,446	1,253	
	793,312		2,504,514					
1953	1,727,970	465,256	26.9	5,825	0.3	937,352	785	740,554
	2,468,524							

From the above Table, there are a series of conclusions which need to be drawn. To start with we can compare its data to those given by Robert Conquest. The latter claims that in 1939 there were 9 million political prisoners in the labour camps and that 3 million others had died in the period 1937-1939. Let the reader not forget that Conquest is here talking only about political prisoners! Apart from these, says Conquest, there were also common criminals who, according to him, were much greater in number than the political prisoners! In 1950 there were, according to Conquest, 12 million political prisoners! Armed with the true facts, we can readily see what a fraudster Conquest really is. Not one of his figures corresponds even remotely to the truth. In 1939 there was a total in all the camps, colonies and prisons of close to 2 million prisoners. Of these 454,000 had committed political crimes, not 9 million as Conquest asserts. Those who died in labour camps between 1937 and 1939 numbered about 160,000, not 3 million as Conquest asserts. In 1950 there were 578,000 political prisoners in labour camps, not 12 million. Let the reader not forget that Robert Conquest to this day remains one of the major sources for right-wing propaganda against communism. Among right-wing pseudo-intellectuals, Robert Conquest is a godlike figure. As for the figures cited by Alexander Solzhenitsyn - 60 million alleged to have died in labour camps - there is no need for comment. The absurdity of such an allegation is manifest. Only a sick mind could promote such delusions.

Let us now leave these fraudsters in order that we may ourselves concretely analyse the statistics relating to the gulag. The first question to be asked is what view we should take about the sheer quantity of people caught up in the penal system? What is the meaning of the figure of 2.5 million? Every person that is put in prison is living proof that society was still insufficiently developed to give every citizen everything he needed for a full life. From this point of view, the 2.5 million do represent a criticism of the society.

The internal and external threat

The number of people caught up in the penal system requires to be properly explained. The Soviet Union was a country which had only recently overthrown feudalism, and its social heritage in matters of human rights was often a burden on society. In an antiquated system like the tsardom, workers were condemned to live in deep poverty, and human life had little value. Robbery and violent crime was punished by unrestrained violence. Revolts against the monarchy usually ended in massacres, death sentences and extremely long prison sentences. These social relations, and the habits of mind associated with them, take a long time to change, a fact which influenced the development of society in the Soviet Union as well as attitudes towards criminals.

Another factor to be taken into account is that the Soviet Union, a country which in the 1930s had close to 160-170 million inhabitants, was seriously threatened by foreign powers. As a result of the great political changes which took place in Europe in the 1930s, there was a major threat of war from the direction of Nazi Germany, a threat to the survival of the Slav people, and the western bloc also harboured interventionist ambitions. This situation was summed up by Stalin in 1931 in the following words: "We are 50-100 years behind the advanced countries. We have to close that gap in 10 years. Either we do it or we will be wiped out." Ten years later, on 22 June 1941, the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany and its allies. Soviet society was forced to make great efforts in the decade from 1930-1940, when the major part of its resources was dedicated to its defence preparations for the forthcoming war against the Nazis. Because of this, people worked hard while producing little by way of personal benefits. The introduction of the 7-hour day was withdrawn in 1937, and in 1939 practically every Sunday was a work day. In a difficult period such as this, with a great war hanging over the development of society for two decades (the 1930s and 1940s), a war which was to cost the Soviet Union 25 million deaths with half the country burnt to a cinder, crime did tend to increase as people tried to help themselves to what life could not otherwise offer them.

During this very difficult time, the Soviet Union held a maximum number of 2.5 million people in its prison system, i.e., 2.4% of the adult population. How can we evaluate this figure? Is it a lot or a little? Let us compare.

More prisoners in the US

In the United States of America, for example, a country of 252 million inhabitants (in

1996), the richest country in the world, which consumes 60% of the world's resources, how many people are in prison? What is the situation in the US, a country not threatened by any war and where there are no deep social changes affecting economic stability?

In a rather small news item appearing in the newspapers of August 1997, the FLT-AP news agency reported that in the US there had never previously been so many people in the prison system as the 5.5 million held in 1996. This represents an increase of 200,000 people since 1995 and means that the number of criminals in the US equals 2.8% of the adult population. These data are available to all those who are part of the North American Department of Justice. The number of convicts in the US today is 3 million higher than the maximum number ever held in the Soviet Union! In the Soviet Union there was a maximum of 2.4% of the adult population in prison for their crimes - in the US the figure is 2.8%, and rising! According to a press release put out by the US Department of Justice on 18 January 1998, the number of convicts in the US in 1997 rose by 96,100.

As far as the Soviet labour camps were concerned, it is true that the regime was harsh and difficult for the prisoners, but what is the situation today in the prisons of the US, which are rife with violence, drugs, prostitution, sexual slavery (290,000 rapes a year in US prisons). Nobody fees safe in US prisons! And this today, and in a society richer than ever before!

An important factor - the lack of medicines

Let us now respond to the third question posed. How many people died in the labour camps? The number varied from year to year, from 5.2% in 1934 to 0.3% in 1953. Deaths in the labour camps were caused by the general shortage of resources in society as a whole, in particular the medicines necessary to fight epidemics. This problem was not confined to labour camps but was present throughout society, as well as in the great majority of countries of the world. Once antibiotics had been discovered and put into general use after the Second World War, the situation changed radically. In fact, the worst years were the war years when the Nazi barbarians imposed very harsh living conditions on all Soviet citizens. During those 4 years, more than half a million people died in the labour camps - half the total number dying throughout the 20-year period in question. Let us not forget that in the same period, the war years, 25 million people died among those who were free. In 1950, when conditions in the Soviet Union had improved and antibiotics had been

introduced, the number of people dying while in prison fell to 0.3%.

Let us turn now to the fourth question posed. How many people were sentenced to death prior to 1953, especially during the purges of 1937-38? We have already noted Robert Conquest's claim that the Bolsheviks killed 12 million political prisoners in the labour camps between 1930 and 1953. Of these 1 million are supposed to have been killed between 1937 and 1938. Solzhenitsyn's figures run to tens of millions supposed to have died in the labour camps - 3 million in 1937-38 alone. Even higher figures have been quoted in the course of the dirty propaganda war against the Soviet Union. The Russian, Olga Shatunovskaya, for example, cites a figure of 7 million dead in the purges of 1937-38.

The documents now emerging from the Soviet archives, however, tell a different story. It is necessary to mention here at the start that the number of those sentenced to death has to be gleaned from different archives and that the researchers, in order to arrive at an approximate figure, have had to gather data from these various archives in a way which gives rise to a risk of double counting and thus of producing estimates higher than the reality. According to Dimitri Volkogonov, the person appointed by Yeltsin to take charge of the old Soviet archives, there were 30,514 persons condemned to death by military tribunals between 1 October 1936 and 30 September 1938. Another piece of information comes from the KGB: according to information released to the press in February 1990, there were 786,098 people condemned to death for crimes against the revolution during the 23 years from 1930-1953. Of those condemned, according to the KGB, 681,692 were condemned between 1937 and 1938. It is not possible to double check the KGB's figures but this last piece of information is open to doubt. It would be very odd for so many people to have been sentenced to death in only two years. Is it possible that the present-day pro-capitalist KGB would give us correct information from the pro-socialist KGB? Be that as it may, it remains to be verified whether the statistics which underlie the KGB information include among those said to have been condemned to death during the 23 years in question common criminals as well as counter-revolutionaries, rather than counter-revolutionaries alone as the pro-capitalist KGB has alleged in a press release of February 1990. The archives also tend to the conclusion that the number of common criminals and the number of counter-revolutionaries condemned to death was approximately equal.

The conclusion we can draw from this is that the number of those condemned to death in 1937-38 was close to 100,000, and not several million as has been claimed by Western propaganda.

It is also necessary to bear in mind that not all those sentenced to death in the Soviet Union were actually executed. A large proportion of death penalties were commuted to terms in labour camps. It is also important to distinguish between common criminals and counter-revolutionaries. Many of those sentenced to death had committed violent crimes such as murder or rape. 60 years ago this type of crime was punishable by death in a large number of countries.

Question 5: How long was the average prison sentence? The length of prison sentences has been the subject of the most scurrilous rumour-mongering in Western propaganda. The usual insinuation is that to be a convict in the Soviet Union involved endless years in prison - whoever went in never came out. This is completely untrue. The vast majority of those who went to prison in Stalin's time were in fact convicted to a term of 5 years at most.

The statistics reproduced in the American Historical Review show the actual facts. Common criminals in the Russian Federation in 1936 received the following sentences: up to 5 years: 82.4%; between 5-10 years: 17.6%. 10 years was the maximum possible prison term before 1937. Political prisoners convicted in the Soviet Union's civilian courts in 1936 received sentences as follows: up to 5 years: 44.2%; between 5-10 years 50.7%. As for those sentenced to terms in the gulag labour camps, where the longer sentences were served, the 1940 statistics show that those serving up to 5 years were 56.8% and those between 5-10 years 42.2%. Only 1% were sentenced to over 10 years.

For 1939 we have the statistics produced by Soviet courts. The distribution of prison terms is as follows: up to 5 years: 95.9%; from 5-10 years: 4%; over 10 years: 0.1%.

As we can see, the supposed eternity of prison sentences in the Soviet Union is another myth spread in the West to combat socialism.

The lies about the Soviet Union

A brief discussion as to the research reports.

The research conducted by the Russian historians shows a reality totally different from that taught in the schools and universities of the capitalist world over the last 50 years. During these 50 years of the cold war, several generations have learnt only lies about the Soviet Union, which have left a deep impression on many people. This fact is also substantiated in the reports made of the French and American research. In these reports are reproduced data, figures and tables enumerating those convicted and those who died, these figures being the subject of intense discussion. But the most important thing to note is that the crimes committed by the people who had been convicted is never a matter of any interest. Capitalist political propaganda has always presented Soviet prisoners as innocent victims and the researchers have taken up this assumption without questioning it. When the researchers go over from their columns of statistics to their commentaries on the events, their bourgeois ideology comes to the fore - with sometimes macabre results. Those who were convicted under the Soviet penal system are treated as innocent victims, but the fact of the matter is that most of them were thieves, murderers, rapists, etc. Criminals of this kind would never be considered to be innocent victims by the press if their crimes were committed in Europe or the US. But since the crimes were committed in the Soviet Union, it is different. To call a murderer, or a person who has raped more than once, an innocent victim is a very dirty game. Some common sense at least needs to be shown when commenting on Soviet justice, at least in relation to criminals convicted of violent crimes, even if it cannot be managed in relation to the nature of the punishment, then at least as regards the propriety of convicting people who have committed crimes of this kind.

The kulaks and the counter-revolution

In the case of the counter-revolutionaries, it is also necessary to consider the crimes of which they were accused. Let us give two examples to show the importance of this question: the first is the kulaks sentenced at the beginning of the 1930s and the second the conspirators and counter-revolutionaries convicted in 1936-38.

According to the research reports insofar as they deal with the kulaks, the rich peasants, there were 381,000 families, i.e., about 1.8 million people sent into exile. A small number of these people were sentenced to serve terms in labour camps or colonies. But what gave rise to these punishments?

The rich Russian peasant, the kulak, had subjected poor peasants for hundreds of

years to boundless oppression and unbridled exploitation. Of the 120 million peasants in 1927, the 10 million kulaks lived in luxury while the remaining 110 million lived in poverty. Before the revolution they had lived in the most abject poverty. The wealth of the kulaks was based on the badly-paid labour of the poor peasants. When the poor peasants began to join together in collective farms, the main source of kulak wealth disappeared. But the kulaks did not give up. They tried to restore exploitation by use of famine. Groups of armed kulaks attacked collective farms, killed poor peasants and party workers, set fire to the fields and killed working animals. By provoking starvation among poor peasants, the kulaks were trying to secure the perpetuation of poverty and their own positions of power. The events which ensued were not those expected by these murderers. This time the poor peasants had the support of the revolution and proved to be stronger than the kulaks, who were defeated, imprisoned and sent into exile or sentenced to terms in labour camps

Of the 10 million kulaks, 1.8 million were exiled or convicted. There may have been injustices perpetrated in the course of this massive class struggle in the Soviet countryside, a struggle involving 120 million people. But can we blame the poor and the oppressed, in their struggle for a life worth living, in their struggle to ensure their children would not be starving illiterates, for not being sufficiently 'civilised' or showing enough 'mercy' in their courts? Can one point the finger at people who for hundreds of years had no access to the advances made by civilisation for not being civilised? And tell us, when was the kulak exploiter civilised or merciful in his dealings with poor peasants during the years and years of endless exploitation.

The purges of 1937

Our second example, that of the counter-revolutionaries convicted in the 1936-38 trials which followed the purges of party, army and state apparatus, has its roots in the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia. Millions of people participated in the victorious struggle against the Tsar and the Russian bourgeoisie, and many of these joined the Russian Communist Party. Among all these people there were, unfortunately, some who entered the party for reasons other than fighting for the proletariat and for socialism. But the class struggle was such that often there was neither the time nor the opportunity to put new party militants to the test. Even militants from other parties who called themselves socialists and who had fought the Bolshevik party were admitted to the Communist Party. A number of these new activists were given important positions in the Bolshevik Party, the state and the armed forces, depending on their individual ability to conduct class struggle. These were very difficult times for the young Soviet state, and the great shortage of

cadres - or even of people who could read - forced the party to make few demands as regards the quality of new activists and cadres. Because of these problems, there arose in time a contradiction which split the party into two camps - on the one hand those who wanted to press forward in the struggle to build a socialist society, and on the other hand those who thought that the conditions were not yet ripe for building socialism and who promoted social-democracy. The origin of these ideas lay in Trotsky, who had joined the party in July 1917. Trotsky was able over time to secure the support of some of the best known Bolsheviks. This opposition united against the original Bolshevik plan provided one of the policy options which were the subject of a vote on 27 December 1927. Before this vote was taken, there had been a great party debate going on over many years and the result left nobody in any doubt. Of the 725,000 votes cast, the opposition secured 6,000 - i.e., less than 1% of party activists supported the united opposition.

As a consequence of the vote, and once the opposition started working for a policy opposed to that of the party, the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to expel from the party the principal leaders of the united opposition. The central opposition figure, Trotsky, was expelled from the Soviet Union. But the story of this opposition did not end there. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Zvdokine afterwards made self-criticisms, as did several leading Trotskyists, such as Pyatakov, Radek, Preobrazhinsky and Smirnov. All of them were once again accepted into the party as activists and took up once more their party and state posts. In time it became clear that the self-criticisms made by the opposition had not been genuine, since the oppositionist leaders were united on the side of the counter-revolution every time that class struggle sharpened in the Soviet Union. The majority of the oppositionists were expelled and re-admitted another couple of times before the situation clarified itself completely in 1937-38.

Industrial sabotage

The murder in December 1934 of Kirov, the chairman of the Leningrad party and one of the most important people in the Central Committee, sparked off the investigation that was to lead to the discovery of a secret organisation engaged in preparing a conspiracy to take over the leadership of the party and the government of the country by means of violence. The political struggle that they had lost in 1927 they now hoped to win by means of organised violence against the state. Their main weapons were industrial sabotage, terrorism and corruption. Trotsky, the main inspiration for the opposition, directed their activities from abroad. Industrial sabotage caused terrible losses to the Soviet state, at enormous cost, for example, important machines were damaged beyond possibility of repair, and there was an

enormous fall in production in mines and factories.

One of the people who in 1934 described the problem was the American engineer John Littlepage, one of the foreign specialists contracted to work in the Soviet Union. Littlepage spent 10 years working in the Soviet mining industry - from 1927-37, mainly in gold mines. In his book In Search of Soviet Gold, he writes: "I never took any interest in the subtleties of political manoeuvring in Russia so long as I could avoid them; but I had to study what was happening in Soviet industry in order to do my work. And I am firmly convinced that Stalin and his collaborators took a long time to discover that discontented revolutionary communists were his worst enemies."

Littlepage also wrote that his personal experience confirmed the official statement to the effect that a great conspiracy directed from abroad was using major industrial sabotage as part of its plans to force the government to fall. In 1931 Littlepage had already felt obliged to take note of this, while working in the copper and bronze mines of the Urals and Kazakhstan. The mines were part of a large copper/bronze complex under the overall direction of Pyatakov, the People's Vice Commissar for Heavy Industry. The mines were in a catastrophic state as far as production and the well-being of their workers was concerned. Littlepage reached the conclusion that there was organised sabotage going on which came from the top management of the copper/bronze complex.

Littlepage's book also tells us from where the Trotskyite opposition obtained the money that was necessary to pay for this counter-revolutionary activity. Many members of the secret opposition used their positions to approve the purchase of machines from certain factories abroad. The products approved were of much lower quality than those the Soviet government actually paid for. The foreign producers gave Trotsky's organisation the surplus from such transactions, as a result of which Trotsky and his co-conspirators in the Soviet Union continued to order from these manufacturers.

Theft and corruption

This procedure was observed by Littlepage in Berlin in the spring of 1931 when buying industrial lifts for mines. The Soviet delegation was headed by Pyatakov, with Littlepage as the specialist in charge of verifying the quality of the lifts and of

approving the purchase. Littlepage discovered a fraud involving low quality lifts, useless for Soviet purposes, but when he informed Pyatakov and the other members of the Soviet delegation of this fact, he met with a cold reception, as if they wanted to overlook these facts and insist he should approve the purchase of the lifts. Littlepage would not do so. At the time he thought that what was happening involved personal corruption and that the members of the delegation had been bribed by the lift manufacturers. But after Pyatakov, in the 1937 trial, confessed his links with the Trotskyist opposition, Littlepage was driven to the conclusion that what he had witnessed in Berlin was much more than corruption at a personal level. The money involved was intended to pay for the activities of the secret opposition in the Soviet Union, activities which included sabotage, terrorism, bribery and propaganda.

Zinoviev, Kamenev, Pyatakov, Radek, Tomsky, Bukharin and others much loved by the Western bourgeois press used the positions entrusted to them by the Soviet people and party to steal money from the state, in order to enable enemies of socialism to use that money for the purposes of sabotage and in their fight against socialist society in the Soviet Union.

Plans for a coup

Theft, sabotage and corruption are serious crimes in themselves, but the opposition's activities went much further. A counter-revolutionary conspiracy was being prepared aimed at taking over state power by means of a coup in which the whole Soviet leadership would be eliminated, starting with the assassination of the most important members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The military side of the coup would be carried out by a group of generals headed by Marshal Tukhachevsky.

According to Isaac Deutscher, himself a Trotskyite, who wrote several books against Stalin and the Soviet Union, the coup was to have been initiated by a military operation against the Kremlin and the most important troops in the big cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad. The conspiracy was, according to Deutscher, headed by Tukhachevsky together with Gamarnik, the head of the army political commissariat, General Yakir, the Commander of Leningrad, General Uborevich, the commander of the Moscow military academy, and General Primakov, a cavalry commander.

Marshal Tukhachevsky had been an officer in the former Tsarist army who, after the revolution, went over to the Red Army. In 1930 nearly 10% of officers (close to 4,500) were former Tsarist officers. Many of them never abandoned their bourgeois outlook and were just waiting for an opportunity to fight for it. This opportunity arose when the opposition was preparing its coup.

The Bolsheviks were strong, but the civilian and military conspirators endeavoured to muster strong friends. According to Bukharin's confession in his public trial in 1938, an agreement was reached between the Trotskyite opposition and Nazi Germany, in which large territories, including the Ukraine, would be ceded to Nazi Germany following the counter-revolutionary coup in the Soviet Union. This was the price demanded by Nazi Germany for its promise of support for the counter-revolutionaries. Bukharin had been informed about this agreement by Radek, who had received an order from Trotsky about the matter. All these conspirators who had been chosen for high positions to lead, administer and defend socialist society were in reality working to destroy socialism. Above all it is necessary to remember that all this was happening in the 1930s, when the Nazi danger was growing all the time and the Nazi armies were setting Europe alight and were preparing to invade the Soviet Union.

The conspirators were sentenced to death as traitors after a public trial. Those found guilty of sabotage, terrorism, corruption, attempted murder and who had wanted to hand over part of the country to the Nazis could expect nothing else. To call them innocent victims is completely mistaken.

More numerous liars

It is interesting to see how Western propaganda, via Robert Conquest, has lied about the purges of the Red Army. Conquest says in his book The Great Terror that in 1937 there were 70,000 officers and political commissars in the Red Army and that 50% of them (i.e., 15,000 officers and 20,000 commissars) were arrested by the political police and were either executed or imprisoned for life in labour camps. In this allegation of Conquest's, as in his whole book, there is not one word of truth. The historian Roger Reese, in his work The Red Army and the Great Purges, gives the facts which show the real significance of the 1937-38 purges for the army. The number of people in the leadership of the Red Army and air force, i.e., officers and political commissars, was 144,300 in 1937, increasing to 282,300 by 1939. During the 1937-38 purges, 34,300 officers and political commissars were expelled for

political reasons. By May 1940, however, 11,596 had already been rehabilitated and restored to their posts. This meant that during the 1937-38 purges, 22,705 officers and political commissars were dismissed (close to 13,000 army officers, 4,700 air force officers and 5,000 political commissars), which amounts to 7.7% of all officers and commissars - not 50% as Conquest alleges. Of this 7.7%, some were convicted as traitors, but the great majority of them, it would appear from historical material available, simply returned to civilian life.

One last question. Were the 1937-38 trials fair to the accused? Let us examine, for example, the trial of Bukharin, the highest party functionary to work for the secret opposition. According to the American ambassador in Moscow at the time, a well-known lawyer called Joseph Davies, who attended the whole trial, Bukharin was permitted to speak freely throughout the trial and put forward his case without impediment of any kind. Joseph Davies wrote to Washington that during the trial it was proved that the accused were guilty of the crimes of which they were charged and that the general opinion among diplomats attending the trial was that the existence of a very serious conspiracy had been proved.

Let us learn from history

The discussion of the Soviet penal system during Stalin's time, on which thousands of lying articles and books have been written, and hundreds of films have been made conveying false impressions, leads to important lessons. The facts prove yet again that the stories published about socialism in the bourgeois press are mostly false. The right wing can, through the press, radio and TV that it dominates, cause confusion, distort the truth and cause very many people to believe lies to be the truth. This is especially true when it comes to historical questions. Any new stories from the right should be assumed to be false unless the contrary can be proved. This cautious approach is justified. The fact is that even knowing about the Russian research reports, the right is continuing to reproduce the lies taught for the last 50 years, even though they have now been completely exposed. The right continues its historical heritage: a lie repeated over and over again ends up being accepted as true. After the Russian research reports were published in the West, a number of books began to appear in different countries aimed solely at calling into question the Russian research and enabling the old lies to be brought to public attention as new truths. These are well-presented books, stuffed from cover to cover with lies about communism and socialism.

The right-wing lies are repeated in order to fight today's communists. They are repeated so that workers will find no alternative to capitalism and neo-liberalism. They are part of the dirty war against communists who alone have an alternative to offer for the future, i.e., socialist society. This is the reason for the appearance of all these new books containing old lies.

All this places an obligation on everybody with a socialist world outlook on history. We must take on the responsibility of working to turn communist newspapers into authentic newspapers of the working classes to combat bourgeois lies! This is without doubt an important mission in today's class struggle, which in the near future will arise again with renewed force.

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